

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CARLO VIMERCATI

Based on his presentation, our newest member, Carlo Vimercati, has had a lifetime of very interesting trials and tribulations.

Giancarlo Vimercati, better known as Carlo, was born in Northern Italy on May 3, 1951. He had a number of health issues during the early years. Immediately after his birth, the doctors diagnosed him as a "blue" baby and didn't expect him to live. But with a strong spirit that followed him throughout his life, he survived this first challenge.

Then, at the age of 6, he was diagnosed with polio. This meant a stay of 2 months in a Milan hospital where he was injected with a new experimental drug every day for 40 days. In the end, the medical people decided that it wasn't polio. But more bad news was to follow. They decided that he had Hepatitis B and further medication was administered. It took another 20 years before he discovered that this was also a false alarm.

During his early years, Carlo's grandparents looked after him while his mother and father worked at a nearby factory. He spent the first 4 years of his school life in a Salesian College. Then, in 1963 at the age of 12, he and his family migrated to South Africa. His parents bought a restaurant and Carlo went to a local high school. He obtained a Diesel Mechanic certificate which led to a part-time university course in Mechanical Engineering. At the same time, he commenced his working life which took him to many parts of Southern Africa. By 1972, he had been appointed as Workshop Manager, a job that would not normally be given to a man of his young years. The highlight of his short career to this time, was working on a major project known as the "Orange-Fish Tunnel".

In 1973, his life turned ninety degrees. The Middle East War broke out. Many of his friends were Jewish and they left to join the Israeli army. Carlo was asked to join them, not to fight but to help by using his diesel mechanic experience. However, by the time he reached Israel, the war was virtually over although it was the start of things to come for a career in the defence forces.

When he returned to South Africa, he was called up for military training. He had the choice to join the army in South Africa or return to his native country and enrol in the army there. He chose the latter. He did his basic training in Palermo and was then transferred to Naples where he started officer training at the NATO headquarters.

After 3 months, he was transferred to an organisation called "Gladio" which was a secret Italian army set up to thwart any communist uprising in the country. This organisation was established after the second world war and was so secretive that the public was not made aware of it until the 1990's. One of the training drills that Carlo had to perform was jumping out of a helicopter from 300 feet to simulate a situation where they could not be detected by radar. He said it was a scary manoeuvre. Shortly after, they started some real missions over the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.

After these exercises, Carlo was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant and was in command of a platoon of 30 men. Over the next few years, he rose to the rank of Captain in charge of 4 companies of special forces with a total of 850 soldiers. The four companies were

strategically placed in Italy, Germany, UK and Spain where communism and terrorism was rife.

Between 1974 and 1988, Gladio fought against the following terrorist groups:

- BR (Brigate Rosse - Italy)
- RAF (Red Army Faction also known as Baader-Meinhof - Germany)
- IRA (Irish Republican Army)
- ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna an armed leftst Basque national group in Spain)
- PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation)
- Black September
- Terrorist groups supported by Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi)

Carlo's role was to order and deploy hundreds of mission against communism and terrorism. He also personally participated in 86 missions over the Iron Curtain and in other countries.

During this time, Carlo had 4 attempts on his life:

- April 1975 by the Sarin nerve gas.
- June 1976 by a long-range sharp shooter. The bullet grazed his body.
- October 1976 by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device).
- January 1977 by a 120mm mortar shell.

After the last life-threatening event, Carlo decided it was time to finish his military career. He was then able to utilise his army experience to obtain a job as a security consultant for Italian construction companies that had operations in many high-risk war-torn countries including Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Zaire, Libya, Lebanon Syria and Sudan.

Carlo finally decided to live a quieter life and, on 13 January 1988, he and his wife Adriana emigrated to Australia where he settled in the safe and sedate suburb of Bulleen. His first job was working for Southern Paper Converters (now known as Visy).

In 1989, Carlo set up his own consultancy company and for the next 28 years, he worked for many international companies in the oil/gas, mining and power industries. Some of these companies included Mobil, Shell, Caltex, BP, BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and many more. His role, which saw him and Adriana relocate on many occasions to Sydney (1 year), Brisbane (10 years), Newcastle (2 years), Perth (1 year) and Adelaide (1 year), was to provide his clients with estimates for the establishment of new projects. These were big high-cost projects that would require massive amounts of infrastructure.

He maintained a high degree of honesty and integrity in this role but there were many times when he was offered bribery money to fudge his estimates which would make the cost of the project seem more favourable and be more easily approved. He said that, if he had accepted these offers, he would be a millionaire today. But he wouldn't have been able to live with the deceit.

In 2015, Carlo decided to semi retire. He returned to Melbourne and settled in Werribee in 2016. He then fully retired in 2017. But, to fill a very busy void in his life, he became actively engaged in a number of community groups including Rotary, St Andrew Parish Fair,

Parish Steering Committee to establish a new school in the Harley estate and Knights of the Southern Cross which supports families in distress.

Carlo's life has been a full and busy one. Unfortunately, his high-risk life in the army had some repercussions. He suffers from PTSD which sees him only being able to sleep for 2-3 hours each night. A sad outcome for someone who has put his heart and soul into a career that has protected the lives of millions of people.

Thanks Carlo for a fascinating insight into your life.

